

Faith Connection

January 2008

Monthly Newsletter of Faith Mennonite Church
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Faith Mennonite Church is a Christ-centered community which seeks to be a place of welcome and nurture for all. Our lives are guided by the life of Jesus and the historic peace position of the Mennonite Church. Our members are people from varied religious backgrounds, and diverse cultures, gay and straight, young and old. We invite you to join us in being a sign of God's healing and hope in our community and world.

Pastoral Musings...

On December 17, Dick Westby and I attended an Interfaith Discussion and Breakfast with Congressman Keith Ellison, held at the Urban League in north Minneapolis. The invitation described the gathering as "a dialogue to promote awareness, understanding and communication among multiple faith communities." As the program began, Representative Ellison asked, "What do faith communities expect from the government?" Several leaders of communities brought prepared answers to that question before the microphone was opened to comments from the broad range of participants. I have continued to reflect upon several of the comments.

Marcia Zimmerman, senior rabbi of Temple Israel in Minneapolis, stressed the importance of maintaining religious freedom in the country. She said that an analysis of Jewish texts through history indicates that when communities were free and thriving, creativity flourished and texts were multi-dimensional, but when the Jewish community was oppressed, the text became one-dimensional. "When people are afraid, they become one-dimensional."

Rev. McAfee, from one of the African-American congregations in north Minneapolis, and Sister Mary Margaret of the north Minneapolis Visitation community both stressed the need to re-double efforts to solve poverty. Sr. Mary Margaret said that our country has the persona of a first world country covering a third-world reality. Rev. McAfee called on people of faith to speak truth to power, questioning why billions of dollars have been spent on a war that was justified with false premises.

Peg Chamberlin, head of the Minnesota and now National Council of Churches, said that congregations sometimes hinder the speaking of truth to power when they become consumers rather than producers. Many congregations, she said, place a higher value on their

pastor as family counselor than as one who speaks truth to power. Her challenge to the government was that elected officials lead with the moral imperative, which considers the welfare of the *whole*.

As we begin a new calendar year, I would encourage us to consider both individually and collectively: Am I/are we nurturing creativity and thinking multi-dimensionally? Am I/are we speaking up about and for the people who are most vulnerable in our society? Am I/are we primarily religious consumers or producers? How might these questions shape us in the coming year?

Happy New Year! May God guide us as we live and work and grow in 2008.

--*Joetta Schlabach*

"Do not look for rest in any pleasure, because you were not created for pleasure: you were created for JOY. And if you do not know the difference between pleasure and spiritual joy you have not yet begun to live."

-- *Thomas Merton*

What's happening at FMC...

New Adult Christian Education Opportunities for the New Year

Three new classes for adults will begin on January 6 and run for 12 weeks:

Food & Spirituality

Facilitated by Carol Harder

Consideration of biblical patterns of food use as witness to God's love is an excellent place to begin the Faith Mennonite Church continuation of the legacy. As we eat, we participate in a co-creative act with God. Can

FMC use food to create holy spaces for people to write yet another chapter of God's love present in the history of the universe? Theory will be combined with hands-on learning. Yes, intellectual stimulation, intuitive openness, emotional fortitude and snacks will be available.

Exploring the New Testament

Facilitated by Hermann Weinlick

What is the place of a book in a faith tradition? How did the New Testament as we know it come to be? How was it decided what to include? Was it written for us? How do the four Gospels differ from each other? What differences in belief and practice do we find among New Testament Christians? These, and the questions you bring, are some of the issues we will try to discuss in a twelve-week study of the New Testament.

Nurturing our Development as Human Beings

Facilitated by Beth Richardson

An interactive discussion among "aged wisdom" (those who have raised children), "those in the midst" (those who are raising children), and "opinionated 3rd parties" (anyone else interested in the discussion). Topics include the stages of human development; human development in relation to parental discipline, the culture, material goods, money, life focus and direction, sexuality, personal health, emotional health, environment, social justice, the peace witness, and the church and religious institutions; developing ourselves and children as spiritual beings; parental relationships with adult children; definitions of family in a mobile society. Additional topic ideas are welcomed.

Neighborhood Group Gatherings

The FMC Neighborhood Groups, which debuted in October, will gather again on Sunday, January 13, from 5-7 p.m. This is a time to get better acquainted with folks who live in the same general geographical area of the metro area as you. We share food and conversation. Watch for details in your mailboxes and e-mail update.

FMC Winter Activities

FMC Ski Weekend, January 26-27. Details are still unfolding, but all who enjoy cross-country skiing and experiencing God in nature should plan to sign up for a weekend at St. Croix State Park.

FMC Women's Retreat, April 25-26, 2008. Women mark your calendars for a spring retreat! We have reserved space at Carondelet Center, Randolph Avenue, in St. Paul. Those who wish may spend Friday night at

the Center; others can join in for a retreat day on Saturday. Carondelet Center offers a beautiful place of retreat right in the city. The Center features an outdoor labyrinth, excellent food, a lovely atmosphere, and all within walking distance of the Mississippi River. A theme has not yet been chosen, so if you have ideas and/or if you would like to help plan the retreat, please speak with Beth Richardson or Joetta Schlabach.

Meet Your Fellow Members

Chris and Annette Semanchin-Jones, who met while they were social workers in Chicago and were married in 2000, both feel strongly about social justice, which is part of what drew them to FMC. While both grew up in Christian traditions that are more conservative than they would now choose, their values are rooted in their early life. Annette, who was raised Roman Catholic, spent a summer working in Chicago while she was a student at Notre Dame, that she found "life-changing." She later spent time in the Jesuit Volunteer Corps. Chris, who was raised in the Church of the Nazarene, recalls a sermon about Jesus as "boss," and a couple of years teaching Sunday school in an African-American church in Chicago.

Annette is now a graduate assistant at the University of Minnesota, while working on a Ph.D. in social work. Chris, after twelve years in social work, is now the main childcare provider, and finds it rewarding to care for their kids. He says he does not feel career-driven.

While I visited in their home the week before Christmas, three-year-old Maggie was walking around the living room playing the part of Mary in the Nativity. Sam, almost five, has a wonderful imagination, and after hearing lots of stories from his father and grandfather, is starting to tell some himself.

For five years, Chris has been part of the Whistle Pigs, a bluegrass band that has played several times at FMC, and he played about forty gigs last year. On Ground Hog Day they will release their second CD, including at least one song of Chris's. Chris also has six banjo and guitar students ranging in age from eight to fifty.

I asked Chris how to live with a feminist. "It's easy," he said. "Just become one. Besides, all the inspirational people in my life have been women." Both Chris and Annette can name many people who have been inspirations to them, which may help explain why they are happy in life now.

--*Hermann Weinlick*

Farewell from Aryn Baxter

Dear FMC Friends,

On January 23rd I'll be taking off for Tanzania with a group of undergraduate students. In addition to being a teaching assistant, I will be spending much of my time doing research. This will involve interviewing community members about their perceptions of the study-abroad program and the community development and service projects it has participated in and supported.

If you would like to occasionally check in for news of my travels and reflections along the way, I welcome you to visit my blog: www.habarizaryn.blogspot.com. (For those interested in learning a little Swahili, *habari za* ... is a common greeting in the Swahili language. It means "news of," and is followed by various endings – news of today, news of your family, news of Aryn, etc.)

Send me an email if you'd like to be added to the list of people I will email whenever I post an update: baxte085@umn.edu. You can also email anytime just to say hello – I would appreciate your updates as well.

I hope to be passing through Minneapolis in July and look forward to visiting!

Kwa heri, (With blessing)

--Aryn Baxter

Letter From Buenos Aires

It is almost Christmastime in Buenos Aires, and it is so weird to be walking down the street in a tank top past all the plastic Christmas trees, tinsel, and oversized Santa dolls in full red snowsuits. It seems that much of the American and Western European Christmas imagery didn't get adapted to the climate here in the Southern Hemisphere.

Everyone here is busy taking tests, giving presentations, and pulling together budgets for the end of the year, and making plans for summer vacation. And I, who am usually up to my ears in Nothing To Do, finally have a real internship! On December 10th, I started as a legal intern at CEJIL, or the Center for Justice and International Law. CEJIL is an NGO that works with the Inter-American System for the protection of human rights, which includes the Inter-American Commission and Inter-American Court on Human Rights. I am currently learning about international law in general and the Inter-American Court in particular. To give a quick overview: most of the countries in the Organization of American States (not including the US and Canada, of course) signed the American Convention on Human

Rights, a treaty that covers basic protections like the right not to be tortured, prohibition of slavery, and the right to a fair trial. If some individual or group of individuals in one of the member states are victims of human rights violations, they can bring the case before the InterAmerican Commission on Human Rights. The Commission will consider the information presented by the individual or NGO bringing the complaint, as well as the State being petitioned against. The Commission can make recommendations to the State and give a certain time frame for them to be completed. If the State doesn't comply, the Commission may then take the case to the InterAmerican Court, which has the power to deliver a sentence which may include a change of policy, public apologies, or monetary and other forms of reparation.

At first it surprised me that any given country, if it was going to commit human rights abuses in the first place, would then be willing to comply with a sentence that required apologies and millions of dollars in fines. It's not like you can send a country to prison for not obeying international laws. However, what people here have explained to me is that international law has a great deal to do with political and economic pressure from the international community. If you're a poor Latin American country dependent on foreign aid, you are much more likely to comply with such a sentence if your alternative is economic sanctions by the rest of the world. This also explains why the US didn't sign the American Convention on Human Rights - we don't have to. Being an economic and military superpower makes it really difficult for the international community to hold the US accountable for the (multiple, serious) human rights violations it commits.

But, it is heartening to see the power of international law to hold at least some countries responsible for their actions. My specific project as an intern is to research jurisprudence on the rights of indigenous peoples. That basically means I read court decisions and write summaries of them so that the lawyers have quick access to the most important legal precedents without having to read every case. CEJIL is involved in almost all of the cases brought before the Inter-American Court, and also conducts trainings of legal service providers throughout Latin America. The research I'm doing will be consolidated into a manual to use for trainings for indigenous rights groups in the region. Supposedly I am going to be here for a month - from December 10th to January 11th - but I'm hoping that I'll be able to continue here, even if it's on a part-time basis.

--Hillary Richardson

Faith Mennonite Church Council Meeting November 12, 2007 @ FMC

Present: Neil Okerlund, Moderator; Joan Kreider, Moderator-elect; Gregg Richardson, Secretary; Joetta Schlabach, Pastor; Minke Sundseth, Missions & Service; Glenn Geissinger, Trustees; Jenny Wandersee, Worship; Hermann Weinlick, Deacons; Rachel Hoskins, Education, Jerry Janzen, Treasurer, Cleta Roth Gingrich, Gifts Discernment.

Absent: Fellowship representative.

Affirmations. Joan and others thank Matthew Blackwell-Kinney for his scriptural interpretations in worship this past month. Neil thanks the Pastoral Discernment Committee for its Sunday school session, and Minke adds, Joan's recap.

Gifts Discernment Committee. Cleta says the survey had a good response. Most who returned it nominated others, not themselves for positions. The Committee would like to propose that Joan and Neil remain in their respective positions for a second year, in order to provide continuity for the pastoral transition, and give Joan time to finish work with the committee. Gregg says the new constitution could not be easily construed to allow them to be reappointed. Glenn says we would need to clearly explain the rationale. Gregg says we would need to have a consensus from the congregation, if we wanted to essentially by-pass the constitution on the proposal. Hermann says that we would be suspending the constitution for those two items only. Glenn says we should print them with the slate of candidates and announce from the pulpit and request feedback. Council agrees to make a decision by early December.

Pastoral Discernment Committee. Joan says the committee has been meeting weekly, and was pleased with the turnout for the Sunday school session. They are trying to get written responses from those who didn't attend. The committee still needs to have its own discussion about its members' preferences, since they've focused so far only on facilitating congregational input. Neil asks how many attended? Joan replies 45-50.

Staff changes. Trustees have written separate job descriptions for the secretarial and custodial positions, rather than combine in a single job description as proposed. Glenn says if we could find one person to do both jobs, that would be ideal. Glenn distributes draft, Council provides feedback. Question—why combine the two roles? Glenn says we could pay them better,

and possibly offer 401k. Gregg says this could also encourage a longer-term commitment. Also retirement pay-ins may or may not need to legally be paid at the same percentages as the pastoral staff, depending on how it's structured. Joetta says pastors actually get a pension, which is different. Minke suggests that the jobs be advertised both separately and as a single combined job. Glenn says that Darrell Martin suggested talking to Bethany Lutheran about possibly sharing a position. Minke suggests also contacting the school and the rec center about sharing a custodial position. Perhaps send a letter to other churches?

Framing a Vision. Neil reiterates the purpose of this exercise, which is to clarify our internal structures and values in order to then clarify our external work. Council brainstorms questions for the Deacons and worship commission.

Treasurer's report. Jerry says giving was down in October, but very high in September, so evened out. We're still pretty much on track. Neil says some people have asked to see a simpler financial report. Discussion about whether this is necessary.

Commission reports.

Education. Commission would like to do an evening Christmas program on December 16, from 5 to 6:15, with a cookie social, then caroling. Shelly talked to parents, they were agreeable. Need to coordinate timing with Community of St. Martin.

Deacons. Reviewed the quarterly neighborhood gatherings. About 50 attended.

Worship. Planning for Advent with the theme "the world is about to turn." They will also be having a biblical "visitor" for children's time each week during Advent.

Missions & Service. Discussed the kiosk, which may need a variance in terms of placement. They will meet with the trustees, and want to get some community input. Also planning a community event for January 26, a discussion of the *Omnivore's Dilemma*, with a potluck, also, later a "peace church" hymn sing.

New business. Council decides on annual meeting date of February 3. The agenda and reports must be published 2 weeks before the meeting, and the gifts discernment slate presented one month before. Commission reports are due by January 9. World Conference will be July 2009, but they want a response on participation by January 2008. Will discuss at December meeting.

--Gregg Richardson, Secretary

What's happening here and there...

Spirituality Corner

Contemplative Worship opportunities.

Pilgrim Lutheran Church, 1935 St. Clair Avenue, Saint Paul, offers a Celtic Contemplative Communion service on the second Sunday of each month, and a Nordic Contemplative Evening Prayer on the fourth Sundays. Both begin at 6:51 p.m.

- January 13: O Light that Followest All My Way
- January 27: Illumines by the Steady Radiance.

A forum on "Meaning, Truth, and the World's Religions precedes each service, beginning at 5:30 p.m.

"Jesus in Guantanamo"

Matthew Vaky performs this hilariously intense one-man show, which he wrote: Jesus Christ has returned to Earth and, being from the Middle East, has been sent to Guantanamo as a terrorist. He has been denied a lawyer and a trial, hasn't been charged, has been sleep-deprived and tortured and he also has some pretty funny ideas about the Bible and man's inhumanity to man. Vaky is a former member of the Guthrie Acting Company and has written, directed, and acted with many local companies including Mixed Blood, Illusion, Children's Theater, Stepping Stone Theatre, the Fringe Festival, and the Bryant Lake Bowl. He taught at the Guthrie and is on the staff at El Colegio Charter School in Minneapolis. Mature themes and strong language.

Monday, January 7, 6:30 p.m. (Potluck Supper), 7:30 p.m. (Performance and Discussion) Plymouth Congregational Church, Howard Conn Theater, 1900 Nicollet Avenue, Minneapolis. Sponsored by: Every Church A Peace Church.

Friday, January 18, 7:00 p.m. Robbinsdale United Church of Christ, 4200 Lake Road, Robbinsdale (Behind Robbinsdale Center). Sponsored by: The National and Global Ministry of Robbinsdale United Church Of Christ and Northwest for Peace. For more information, call Carole, 763-546-5368 or email nwn4p.pbwiki.com.

One Voice Concert

One Voice Mixed Chorus, Minnesota's gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and straight allies choir, illuminates the new year with a weekend of concerts

that explores images of light and shadow, highlighted by choral masterworks of Johannes Brahms. Joining One Voice for these performances are two special guests: Dr. Vance George, a four-time Grammy Award-winning conductor formerly with the San Francisco Symphony Chorus, and St. Paul's own Central High School Concert Choir, led by Martha Coventry Graber. The concerts, "Uncommon Light: Brahms and the Beauty of Shadow," take place on January 25 and 26 at 7:30 p.m. at Central Presbyterian Church in St. Paul, with a special free concert at St. Paul's Central High School on January 25 at 1 p.m. Ticket prices range from \$10 to \$25; they can be ordered online at www.ovmc.org or by calling 651-298-1954.

Faith and Sexuality

The "Dialogues On The Intersections Of Identity" series, sponsored by the Office on Equity and Diversity of the U of M, continues with a January conversation focusing on faith and sexuality. What are the prominent and pressing questions, complexities, contradictions, and collisions of faith and sexuality? In addition to issues of sexual identity and expression, faith and sexuality also intersect and sometimes collide over sexual practice and purpose. Likewise, human belief is revealed across a wide spectrum from atheism and renunciation of all religion, to agnosticism, to Jewish, Christian, and Islamic fundamentalism, to Christians queering the Bible to retaining faith through broadened examination and understanding of various sacred texts and scriptures. Regardless of where you stand personally on the faith continuum, this will conversation will challenge you to consider diverse perspectives. Join University faculty, students and staff members in a probing and thought-provoking dialogue on the intersections of belief, morality, ethics, and human sexuality. Tuesday, January 29, 2008 2:30-4:30 p.m. 2-101 Hasselmo Hall (near Coffman Union).

Letter from Meserete Kristos Church

[FMC contributes to the support of Meserete Kristos Church in Ethiopia]

Warm greetings of love from sunny Debre Zeit, Ethiopia! Vera and I are thankful that we are in good health. We keep quite busy. Vera works every day in the College library, sorting out 332 boxes of used donated books, entering into the computer the ones that are to go to the library, and putting the rest into our textbook store room. Besides working with College Advancement activities, I am teaching a senior course on Peace and Justice Issues this semester.

Bit by bit, we are getting the “field” to look more like a College campus. Within the past year we have built a kitchen, dining hall/chapel, a latrine/wash house, a transformer/ generator house, a workshop, a carport, a gate and guard house, and also a water system for irrigating, all small but necessary additions to the development of a viable campus. This week we have started excavating for the building of a faculty guest house which will be a two storey building with three bachelor suites sharing a common kitchen and living room, and one family apartment on each floor. This is to be completed by June. Vera and I are wistfully hoping we can be among the first occupants. We also expect to see this week a second excavation for the foundation of the first dormitory for men. If funds come in, we want to start construction on a second dorm for women early in the new year. We hope to have dorm space for 300 by September 2008. We will have a graduation of 61 students on January 5th. We took in 44 new ones into the intensive English program in September.

Our Ethiopian Meserete Kristos Church here just won another 20,000 new believers to Christ this past year. Taking into consideration losses by dropping out, deaths, and transfers, the net increase of the number of baptized members was 12,000, making a total of 156,000. The number of congregations grew from 398 to 444 this year. Church planting centers are now 751. This continued growth inspires us to push ahead with the huge challenge of training leaders to shepherd these people.

Vera and I plan to go “home” (wherever that is??) in about 6 months from now in early June for our next two-month furlough. We plan to be in Virginia in time for our oldest grandchild, Jasmine’s graduation from High School on June 12. Since we are on the verge of retirement age, we are asking for some additional two or three months extended home leave to be with family and to take care of some business in Virginia. We want to spend a month or so in Alberta this summer, no dates set yet. We plan to return to Ethiopia in mid fall for a one year term at a time. Do keep on praying for us! Have a blessed Christmas and a prosperous year ahead!

--Carl & Vera Hansen

Who Shall Deliver Me?

God strengthen me to bear myself,
That heaviest weight of all to bear,
Inalienable weight of care.

All others are outside myself;
I lock the door and bar them out,
The turmoil, tedium, gad-about.

I lock my door upon myself,
and bar them out; but who shall wall
Self from myself, most loathed of all?

If I could once lay down myself,
And start self-purged upon the race
That all must run! Death runs apace.

If I could set aside myself,
And start with lightened heart upon
The road by all men overgone!

God harden me against myself,
This coward with pathetic voice
Who craves for ease, and rest, and joys:

Myself, arch-traitor to myself;
My hollowest friend, my deadliest foe,
My clog whatever road I go.

Yet One there is can curb myself,
Can roll the strangling load from me,
Break off the yoke and set me free.

--Christina Rossetti

Deadline for February newsletter items is noon, January 24th.

Faith Mennonite Church publishes our official monthly newsletter Faith Connection. The purpose of this publication is to enhance communication about the various types of the ministry of our congregation among the members and also with the community. Due to the space limitation, the editor may edit, modify, and change the submitted documents.